

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R. I.

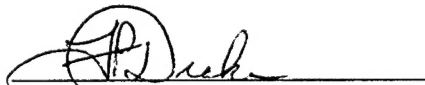
GERMANY AGAINST BRITAIN:  
IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A CAMPAIGN

by

Fred P. Drake, Jr.  
Commander, USN

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

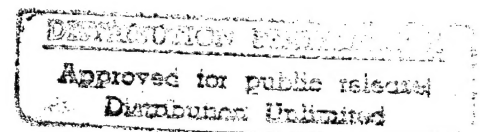
The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

14 June 1996

Paper directed by  
Captain G. W. Jackson, USN  
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department



19960813 153

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): Germany Against Britain: It Should Have Been a Campaign (U)			
9. Personal Authors: Fred P. Drake, Jr., CDR, United States Navy			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 14 June 1996	
12. Page Count: 23			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Operational Leadership, Thorough Planning, Campaign, Major Operation, Objective, Joint Operations			
15. Abstract: German military leadership during World War II is generally recognized for their exceptional performance in the operational and tactical levels of war. During the first nine months of the war, Germany successfully completed three separate major operations defeating France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Poland. Yet, despite these successful operations and Germany's continuing maritime interdiction operations they were not able to defeat their only remaining adversary in the summer of 1940, Britain. Using the principals of war to analyze Germany's efforts, poor operational leadership and inadequate planning were identified as key factors in Germany's failure to coerce Britain to sue for peace or defeat her. The German planning process was impaired by their over-confidence, lack of a clear strategic objective and an incomplete comparison of their capabilities against their intentions. They generated a flawed estimate of the situation against Britain due to an apparently over-optimistic view of their own military capabilities, interservice rivalries and under-estimation of the British. Although they did discuss peripheral warfare as a potential course of action (COA), they limited their serious discussions to direct attacks on England designed to achieve a quick decisive victory. Their COA decided, they implemented two autonomous major operations instead of a synchronized campaign plan designed to exploit the synergism of coordinated operations. Unlike Germany's previous operations, Hitler retained overall command of operations against Britain for himself. He ordered the Luftwaffe to attack England and the Kriegsmarine to continue maritime interdiction operations without articulating a clear, defined objective. Both subordinate commanders knew Hitler's vague desired end state but only Admiral Raeder was able to translate it into a clear vision and progress towards success. Goring's failure to provide clear vision or adequate guidance to the Luftwaffe caused his operation to fail.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified  X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841-6461		20. Office Symbol: C	

## ABSTRACT

German military leadership during World War II is generally recognized for their exceptional performance in the operational and tactical levels of war. During the first nine months of the war, Germany successfully completed three separate major operations defeating France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Poland. Yet, despite these successful operations and Germany's continuing maritime interdiction operations they were not able to defeat their only remaining adversary in the summer of 1940, Britain. Using the principals of war to analyze Germany's efforts, poor operational leadership and inadequate planning were identified as key factors in Germany's failure to coerce Britain to sue for peace or defeat her.

The German planning process was impaired by their over-confidence, lack of a clear strategic objective and an incomplete comparison of their capabilities against their intentions. They generated a flawed estimate of the situation against Britain due to an apparently over-optimistic view of their own military capabilities, interservice rivalries and under-estimation of the British. Although they did discuss peripheral warfare as a potential course of action (COA), they limited their serious discussions to direct attacks on England designed to achieve a quick decisive victory. Their COA decided, they implemented two autonomous major operations instead of a synchronized campaign plan designed to exploit the synergism of coordinated operations.

Unlike Germany's previous operations, Hitler retained overall command of operations against Britain for himself. He ordered the *Luftwaffe* to attack England and the *Kriegsmarine* to continue maritime interdiction operations without articulating a clear, defined objective. Both subordinate commanders knew Hitler's vague desired end state but only Admiral Raeder was able to translate it into a clear vision and progress towards success. Göring's failure to provide clear vision or adequate guidance to the *Luftwaffe* caused his operation to fail.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
STRATEGIC SETTING	2
AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS	2
Decision Making Process	2
Objective	4
Offensive	5
Maneuver	6
Unity of Command	7
Security	8
Surprise	9
Simplicity	10
Mass	11
Economy of Force	12
LESSONS LEARNED	12
Operational Objective	12
Measures of Effectiveness	13
Sequels and Branches	14
Commander's Estimate of the Situation	14
Campaign Plan	15
Overconfidence	15
Thorough Planning	15
Suppress the Enemy's Air Defenses	16
CONCLUSION	16
NOTES	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY	19

*"With many calculations, one can win; with few one cannot. How much less chance of victory has one who makes none at all!"<sup>1</sup>*

## **INTRODUCTION**

German forces demonstrated an exceptional understanding of the operational and tactical levels of war during the second world war<sup>2</sup>. Despite being ill-equipped for war<sup>3</sup> they successfully completed three major operations within the first year of the war. Fighting British, French and other European forces during all three major operations, they conquered France, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland and Poland. Despite these impressive operational successes, the Germans could not defeat nor coerce Great Britain to sue for peace under terms favorable to Germany. Using the Principals of War and other operational concepts to analyze German actions against Britain from September 1939 to December 1940, the leadership and planning problems that prevented German success can be identified as lessons learned for today's operational level commander.

## **STRATEGIC SETTING**

During the late 1930s the economies of Europe began a slow recovery from the Great Depression. During this time the German government rearmed its military, annexed Austria and coerced Czechoslovakia and into ceding some of its territory to Germany. Britain and France, the two remaining great powers in Europe, adopted a policy of appeasement in an attempt to prevent another European war without straining their fragile economies with large military buildups. By early 1939 Britain and France realized that appeasement was not working and that they would have to respond to any further German aggression.

Hitler did not want to go to war with Great Britain. As early as 1925 he indicated in secret writings that he believed Germany would become the primary continental power in Europe with Britain (as Germany's ally) and her empire ruling the seas<sup>4</sup>. It was not until late

1938 that he came to the realization that he might have to go to war with Britain.

Consequently, Hitler directed the German military to begin preliminary studies into this problem. Prior to this realization, the German military was not authorized to conduct any contingency planning or war-games<sup>5</sup> targeting Britain to prevent possible misunderstandings. As a result of Hitler's willingness to risk war with Britain, the *Kriegsmarine* was ordered to station U-boats off the West coast of the British Islands and the Iberian peninsula in addition to its naval assets positioned in the North and Baltic Seas as the Army and Air Force prepared for the invasion of Poland. Hitler's intent was to order all naval units to engage the Royal Navy and British merchant shipping<sup>6</sup> in addition to his pre-planned operations against Poland, if Britain entered the war.

Three days after Germany invaded Poland, Britain gave Germany an ultimatum<sup>7</sup> to remove German forces from Poland or she would declare war on Germany<sup>8</sup>. The ultimatum expired with no German response and, as a result, a state of war existed between Germany and Britain. Five days later, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), operating with the French army, engaged the Germans in the Saar offensive in an unsuccessful attempt to convince Hitler to discontinue the invasion. At approximately the same time, the *Kriegsmarine* began maritime interdiction operations against Britain<sup>9</sup>.

## **AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS**

### **Decision Making Process.**

After the Germans completed the invasion of Poland<sup>10</sup> they began developing a strategy against Britain. Peripheral warfare was discussed as a potential course of action (COA) early in the process but the German leadership decided to concentrate on COAs that

directly attacked England. This decision was presumably made due to the estimated time required for the effects of peripheral warfare to convince Britain to seek a negotiated peace and Hitler's desire to continue his Eastward expansion as soon as possible.

Within their direct attack discussions, there were three COAs that were seriously considered by the Germans: "...siege; psychological warfare through terror attacks on population centers; and landing assault with the object of occupation."<sup>11</sup> Although they began deliberations on their British Strategy in the fall of 1939 they did not develop a sense of urgency to make a decision until July of 1940, after they successfully completed their major operations against Norway and France<sup>12</sup>.

During these discussions, Hitler offered peace terms to the British that he felt were very generous. Despite being rejected he held on to his vision for the future and his hope that he could convince Britain to sue for peace<sup>13</sup>. Hitler stuck to this approach until the euphoria of the French defeat began to wear off. Hitler's confidence grew as he realized Germany had successfully completed three major operations conquering most of western Europe. German forces fought the British in all of those major operations and won<sup>14</sup>. Overwhelmed with the "ease" and speed of these victories Hitler approved plans for the *Luftwaffe* to conduct operations to achieve air superiority with the later possibility of an invasion of Britain<sup>15</sup> in addition to the *Kriegsmarine*'s continuing maritime interdiction operations.

*"A landing in England can be taken into view only if the command of the air has been gained by the German Air Force. A landing should therefore not be undertaken for the purpose of overthrowing England militarily, which can practically be achieved through the Air Force and the Navy, but only to deal the death stroke, if still necessary, to an economically paralyzed and in the air impotent England. It is not expected this state will come to pass before the end of August or early September;...nevertheless the landing must be prepared in all details as ultima ratio."*<sup>16</sup>

## Objective.

Hitler's strategic objective was to force Britain out of the war, he did not want to destroy the British empire and have others benefit from Germany's efforts.

*"If we smash England militarily, the British world falls in pieces. From that Germany gets nothing. German blood would have gained something for the good of Japan, America and others."*<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately for the Germans, Hitler did not produce a comprehensive campaign plan for the *Luftwaffe* or the *Kriegsmarine* to follow. Consequently, they conducted autonomous operations with little or no coordination.

On August 1, 1940 Führer Directive 17 was issued and 14 days later the *Luftwaffe* began its attack on Britain. The *Luftwaffe*'s operational objective was to achieve air superiority and destroy targets that supported the RAF's capability to defend England.<sup>18</sup> Once that was achieved, the *Luftwaffe* was to shift its objective to destroy Britain's ports, especially the installations serving food distribution. Secretly, Hitler and Göring modified the *Luftwaffe*'s objective to induce terror<sup>19</sup>. In addition, Göring had his own personal agenda, he wanted the *Luftwaffe* to win the war with Britain with no assistance from the other services<sup>20</sup>

The operational center of gravity the *Luftwaffe* faced was the Royal Air Force (RAF) fighter command. Initially, the *Luftwaffe* targeted RAF fighters and their infrastructure, conforming with *Führer* Directive 17, and achieved great success. However, Göring, who "...rarely held to a tactic long enough for a profitable return...."<sup>21</sup> changed the *Luftwaffe*'s targeting priorities prior to crippling RAF fighter command and the RAF was able to recover from the initial attacks<sup>22</sup>. Göring's mistakes coupled with the massive losses the *Luftwaffe* suffered caused Hitler to terminate the operation and any further discussion of invasion.



Meanwhile, the *Kriegsmarine* was tasked to continue maritime interdiction operations. The *Kriegsmarine* was "...granted freedom to begin projected intensified naval warfare."<sup>23</sup> U-boat operations against merchant shipping to destroy food stuffs and strategic material would continue until the end of the war. The *Kriegsmarine*'s operational objective was to strangle the British economy.

The German Navy correctly identified Britain's key critical vulnerability, Britain's dependence on her "...sea trade for food and raw materials, and above all for building up her military strength."<sup>24</sup> Britain's strategic center of gravity was the will of her people and her maritime trade supplied her with fifty percent of her food<sup>25</sup>.

*"the only thing that really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril....It did not take the form of flaring battles and glittering achievements, it manifested itself through statistics, diagrams and curves unknown to the nation, incomprehensible to the public."* - Winston Churchill<sup>26</sup>

One of Germany's mistakes was not properly resourcing her maritime interdiction effort. Although the Navy's U-boat production effort was given priority two, behind the *Luftwaffe*, it did not receive more than five percent of Germany's steel production until after Hitler terminated the *Luftwaffe*'s operation over England<sup>27</sup>.

### **Offensive.**

By their nature, both major operations were offensive, designed to "...seize, retain, and exploit the initiative."<sup>28</sup> U-boat and surface raider operations were hunter killer missions designed to seek out and destroy the enemy. *Luftwaffe* air operations were designed to seek out and destroy ground based targets while luring RAF fighters in to engagements with German fighters. Both major operations allowed the Germans to pick the time and place for battle and both operations kept Britain in a defensive, siege mindset.

## Maneuver.

The Germans thought they were able to "...place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power."<sup>29</sup> They were able to pick the time and place of all engagements with the exception of RAF bomber command's strategic bombing raids on Germany. As the offensive belligerent attacking Britain's homeland the *Luftwaffe* was aware of its longer lines of operation; the limited ranges and tactics of its fighter cover<sup>30</sup>; and the higher risks German aircrew faced<sup>31</sup>. Göring's opinion of the *Luftwaffe*'s qualitative superiority presumably made those risks acceptable.

Unfortunately for Göring, the RAF was in a better position for maneuver than the *Luftwaffe*. RAF fighters had shorter, interior lines of operation which gave them more time aloft to engage the enemy and faster turn-around times.<sup>32</sup> Fighting over friendly territory, RAF aircrew could be rescued and returned to combat if they were shot down by the Germans. The RAF also had radar (which gave them early warning), good ground based command and control (which gave them good intercept directions) and good intelligence, the German's targets for the next day (the British had broken German Enigma communication encryption system).

The naval picture was different, U-boats were difficult to detect and engage. During the first two years of the war the British were at a significant disadvantage, they were still working with short range antisubmarine warfare technology designed for World War I. Consequently, the first indications that a merchant vessel had was the U-boat surfacing for attack (before prize regulations were changed) or the torpedo wake approaching the ship. The *Kriegsmarine* was able to pass intelligence via high frequency (HF) radio, their U-boats

were able to intercept targets (at points of their choosing), and were able to organize themselves into “packs” and conduct multi-boat attacks. Even with compromised Enigma information it was very difficult for the Royal Navy to counter the U-boat threat. It would take a jump in technology before maneuver would become less of an advantage for German U-boats.

### **Unity of Command.**

Unlike the Norwegian invasion where operational command was given to an army general, Hitler “reserved” overall command of operations against Britain<sup>33</sup>. He did not create theater of operations or design a comprehensive campaign plan, he issued one overall directive, *Führer* Directive 17, which provided tasking to the individual services. Lacking enthusiasm for naval operations, he allowed Admiral Raeder, as Commander in Chief of the *Kriegsmarine*, to direct the *Kriegsmarine*’s maritime interdiction operations without much interference. Hitler also allowed Göring, as Commander in Chief of the *Luftwaffe*, to direct the *Luftwaffe*’s efforts, however, he made several changes in Göring’s operations.

Both major operations were conducted autonomously, there was little or no cooperation or coordination between them. The *Kriegsmarine* eventually received long range aircraft from the *Luftwaffe* to aid in their maritime interdiction efforts, however, these aircraft only participated in one successful mission<sup>34</sup>. Additionally these aircraft were recalled by Göring for *Luftwaffe* operations over England<sup>35</sup>. The climate between the services was tense, Göring and the *Luftwaffe* were out to prove they could defeat England by themselves<sup>36</sup>.

## Security

The Germans suffered three operational security problems: undetected loss of communications encryption security (Enigma); short range and limited fighter escort tactics for their bombers; and inability to recover lost aircrew shot down over England, the North Sea or the English Channel.

Enigma was the encryption machine the Germans used to send coded messages between commanders. It was a communications encryption device that was a very close derivative of the Enigma machine exhibited for sale at the 1923 congress of the International Postal Union<sup>37</sup>. British intelligence acquired some Enigma machines and developed the ability to break the German codes. Although the British used information collected from Enigma for RAF intercept and counter U-boat operations, German intelligence never suspected their communications system had been compromised.

German fighter escorts, the Me-109 and the Me-110, had very short ranges which provided limited protection for their bombers. The *Luftwaffe* did not significantly change its escort tactics during its air offensive against Britain which further reduced the security available for its bombers as RAF fighters learned to exploit German tactics. Göring was targeting RAF fighters and was presumably using his bombers as bait. The loss of these bombers reduced the resources available for future operations and resulted in Hitler terminating the operation. If Göring's tactical commanders been ordered to change their tactics or Göring had considered security while generating his targeting priorities he could have husbanded his resources better with little or no loss of effectiveness.

German aircraft engaged the British over England, the English Channel and the North Sea. While several pilots and their aircrew were able to abandon their aircraft and parachute to safety the Germans had no way to recover them from England and limited capabilities of recovering them from the sea. Here was another loss of resources, for limited gain, that could have been used in Germany's Russian operation the following year.

The one advantage the Germans did have was security of their infrastructure. Fighting over enemy territory or over the high seas meant that there was little chance of any hostile acts or influence on their bases or ground based personnel. The only danger the Germans faced at this point was RAF bomber command's strategic bombing effort which was limited compared to the *Luftwaffe*'s operation against the British.

### Surprise.

Despite Enigma compromises, German U-boat crews often surprised their targets. Many U-boat victims were targets of opportunity, sighted by chance as the U-boats patrolled known shipping lanes, and the U-boat on the scene was able to attack with no intelligence or direction from headquarters. With no information to be compromised and the primitive state of U-boat detection, U-boats were able to achieve surprise often. As an added bonus, U-boat ease of concealment resulted in British merchant shipping expending time and other resources to conform with anti-U-boat tactics, even when the U-boats were not on station.

The *Luftwaffe*'s operation, however, was not as fortunate. RAF fighter command received compromised Enigma communications traffic on a regular basis and knew the German targets for the day<sup>38</sup>. With the exception of weather changes, their information was usually accurate and RAF could plan its response and significantly improve its effectiveness.

The other problem the Germans faced was radar. The British had a good early warning system with radar and a backup system of coast watchers. Having a significant amount of warning, RAF could launch their fighters early enough to get a physical advantage on the Germans, maintain command and control from ground controllers and have an optimum combat fuel load at the beginning of an engagement.

Other than psychological operations, and the *Luftwaffe* did drop leaflets over Britain announcing Germany's impending invasion, the *Luftwaffe* had little chance of achieving operational surprise.

### Simplicity.

*"Simplicity....to prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders to ensure thorough understanding."*<sup>39</sup>

The tasking for both major operations was very simple. *Führer* Directive 17 gave guidance for the *Luftwaffe*'s operation and "carte blanche" to the *Kriegsmarine*:

1. Fight the RAF down with all forces available through attack on flight units, their ground organization, communications, aircraft industry and anti-aircraft equipment.
2. After air superiority is achieved, shift attack to ports, especially the installations serving food distribution to the interior. Spare southern ports as practicable.
3. Air attack on naval and merchant ships may thus be stepped down unless contributing to objectives of 2.
4. Remain ready to support naval operations and Sea Lion.
5. I reserve terror attacks in reprisal for my own ordering.
6. Intensified air war may begin 5 August at discretion of *Luftwaffe*. The Navy is granted freedom to begin projected intensified naval warfare.

*-Summarized tasks of Führer Directive 17*<sup>40</sup>

As can be seen from *Führer* Directive 17, Hitler was not committed to the invasion of England and had no operational or strategic vision beyond the "air war"<sup>41</sup>. He was going to conduct an "air war" on Britain and develop his future plans after determining the results of the *Luftwaffe*'s operation. Add to this the fact that Göring was out to prove that the *Luftwaffe* could win the war against Britain by itself and would change the *Luftwaffe*'s

direction to achieve his goal<sup>42</sup>. Hitler's tasking may have been uncomplicated and concise but it did not produce a clear understanding of the desired operational or strategic end state.

As can be seen, the *Kriegsmarine's* tasking was extremely vague and gave little understanding of Hitler's desired end state for their operation. Hitler concentrated on the *Luftwaffe's* operation, presumably because it had the promise of achieving a quick decisive victory, and all but ignored the *Kriegsmarine's* effort. It was Admiral Raeder's ability to translate Hitler's vague tasking into a clear vision and articulating it to the *Kriegsmarine* that produced simple tasking that supported the *Kriegsmarine's* objective.

### Mass.

*"Mass....to concentrate the effects of combat power at the place and time to achieve decisive results....To achieve mass is to synchronize appropriate joint force capabilities where they will have decisive effect in a short period of time."*<sup>43</sup>

Both major operations were able to achieve mass at the tactical level for various battles but neither major operation was able to achieve mass at the operational level.

The *Kriegsmarine's* operation did not have enough combat power to achieve a *decisive* effect. While German maritime interdiction did have a significant effect on Britain's economy and food supply, she was still able to maintain adequate supplies of armaments and food necessary to continue her war effort.

The *Luftwaffe*, on the other hand, had the resources but did not concentrate its effect for a long enough period of time to achieve decisive results. Göring's tendency to change targeting priorities too often<sup>44</sup> and Hitler's decision to stop the *Luftwaffe's* operation too soon<sup>45</sup> precluded a decisive effect. Consequently Britain was able to continue her war effort after the *Luftwaffe's* operation ended.

Neither major operation conducted joint operations on a large scale or very well. The *Luftwaffe* did not desire any assistance from the *Kriegsmarine*, with the exception of picking up downed aircrew in the English Channel or the North Sea. The *Kriegsmarine*, on the other hand, wanted long range aircraft to assist in their maritime interdiction operations. Although Göring did loan the Navy some long range aircraft, they only participated in one successful mission and were recalled for the *Luftwaffe*'s operation.

### **Economy of Force.**

It appears that Hitler considered the Navy's maritime interdiction operation to be a secondary effort as demonstrated by the lack his personal attention, limited reference in *Führer* directive 17 and limited *Luftwaffe* support. With the *Luftwaffe*'s operation apparently being the primary operation all essential combat power (*Luftwaffe* aircraft) was dedicated to Göring and non essential combat power (*Kriegsmarine* and Army assets) was available for the secondary operation (maritime interdiction), occupation and preparation for possible invasion.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

**Operational Objective.** A well planned operation needs a well defined operational objective. While Hitler had a vague desired strategic objective, he wanted to force Britain out of the war, it was not clear or well defined. He vacillated between occupation and forced negotiation for peace. Without a clear strategic objective it becomes very difficult to define a clear, unambiguous operational objective.

Curiously, Raeder did define a clear, unambiguous objective for the Navy's operation, strangle the British economy. Unfortunately both Hitler and Göring failed to do the same for the *Luftwaffe*'s operation. Initially the *Luftwaffe*'s objective was to achieve air superiority but



Hitler allowed Göring to keep changing the *Luftwaffe*'s targeting priorities which effectively changed the obscured the *Luftwaffe*'s objective. Consequently, the *Kriegsmarine*'s operation made great progress towards achieving their objective<sup>46</sup> while the *Luftwaffe* failed to achieve their objective.

**Measures of Effectiveness.** Each major operation needs accurate measures of effectiveness (MOE) to assess its progress towards its objective.

The *Kriegsmarine* had two good MOEs: tonnage of merchant shipping sunk; and numbers of German U-boats lost. Although maritime interdiction crews did not know what was in the hold of the ships they sunk, the Navy's leadership could correlate the tonnage sunk with the tonnage normally received to estimate the impact of their operation. This estimate could have been validated by Human Intelligence from Britain reporting on shortages of military and civilian goods, armament production and food rationing data. The number of U-boats lost was considered with the operation's perceived effectiveness to determine whether the effort was worth the price.

The *Luftwaffe* had two poor MOEs: numbers of RAF fighters mission capable; and number of German aircraft lost. With a vague, changing objective coupled with poor intelligence it was difficult for the *Luftwaffe* to determine how effective their operation was. At one point *Luftwaffe* intelligence told Göring that the RAF only had 300 fighters available when in fact the RAF had 700 fighters available<sup>47</sup> which allowed him to tell Hitler that he was making progress. Other reports corrected the *Reichmarschall* which was another contributing factor to Hitler's decision to terminate the *Luftwaffe*'s operation. Other than victory, the *Luftwaffe* did not know what operational end state they wanted to achieve so they could not

determine whether they were making progress. In the end, Hitler made his decision to terminate the *Luftwaffe*'s operation based on the numbers of German aircraft lost never knowing that the *Luftwaffe* had come close to achieving his vague strategic objective<sup>48</sup>.

**Sequels and Branches.** No major operation will be precisely executed as planned, the operational commander needs to be prepared to implement changes as necessary. The Germans were not very good at this.

For example, when the Germans defeated the French in the summer of 1940, much sooner than anticipated, it took two additional months to formulate a plan against Britain even though they had been working on it since the previous fall. This gave the British two additional months to prepare their defenses before the *Luftwaffe*'s operation began. The Germans repeated this mistake in the fall of 1940 when Hitler terminated the *Luftwaffe*'s operation. They did not have a list of possible courses of action available to continue their offensive against Britain and Hitler decided to attack Russia as an indirect way of influencing Britain<sup>49</sup>.

**Commander's Estimate of the Situation.** As the first step in the planning for a campaign or major operation, the Operational Commander needs to conduct a thorough Commander's Estimate of the Situation. While the Germans did compile a list of possible COAs they did not balance their capabilities with their intentions or accurately estimate Britain's ability to respond to each COA. Additionally, they failed to produce a commander's intent to allow subordinate commanders a chance to display the kind of *operieren*<sup>50</sup> that the Army found crucial to their success in their three previous major operations.

**Campaign Plan.** When planning multiple major operations in the same theater, the theater commander should endeavor to coordinate them in a comprehensive campaign plan.

There are those who would argue that in reality the Germans executed an unplanned campaign<sup>51</sup>, however, the lack of coordination between the two major operations indicates they were executed as two mutually exclusive major operations. This precluded any synergetic effect that could have been achieved. Had the Luftwaffe targeted shipping instead of some of their non-RAF related targets, they could have enhanced the Navy's maritime interdiction effort without degrading their own performance against the RAF<sup>52</sup>.

**Overconfidence.** When achieving unanticipated success do not become overwhelmed by that success.

The Germans successfully completed three major operations with unanticipated speed and efficiency within the previous year. The Germans fought and defeated British forces in each one of those operations<sup>53</sup>. These impressive successes probably influenced the German leadership to over estimate their own capabilities and under estimate the British when they were planning their operations against Britain.

**Thorough Planning.** When planning a major operation and time is not a constraint, take the time necessary to complete thorough planning, especially when the plans include operations that have not been attempted before.

It is readily apparent that Göring and the *Luftwaffe*'s leadership did not have a firm concept on how they were going to defeat Britain by themselves. Up to this point the *Luftwaffe* had been highly successful in a close air support role for the Army. The operation in Britain was a different operational concept and required detailed planning. The Germans

had time, however, they hurriedly completed their plan within days of Hitler's approval and commenced the *Luftwaffe*'s operation two weeks after Führer Directive 17 was issued.

**Suppress the Enemy's Air Defenses.** When attempting to achieve air superiority or air supremacy suppress the enemy's air defenses first.

*Führer* directive 17 directed the *Luftwaffe* to achieve air superiority by attacking RAF fighters and their infrastructure. While the *Luftwaffe* did target British radar sites and command and control nodes as part of the RAF's infrastructure, they stopped short of destroying either system<sup>54</sup>. Allowing the British to maintain their radar sites and their command and control systems allowed RAF fighter command to optimize the use of their limited assets.

### CONCLUSION

In view of the analysis conducted above using the principals of war and other operational concepts it becomes clear that the German leadership did not display the exceptional operational leadership that they were noted for. Failing to define a clear strategic objective, they identified vague military conditions required to achieve that objective and did not conduct the thorough planning necessary to produce a sequence of events that would bring about those conditions<sup>55</sup>. Instead, they relied on the German concept of *operieren* that proved successful in their three previous major operations. Unfortunately for Germany, their leadership failed to articulate the vision necessary to allow subordinate commanders to exercise *operieren* and achieve unity of effort.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen E. Förster "The Dynamics of Volksgemeinschaft: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War," in Military Effectiveness: Vol. III. The Second World War ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 214.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Ansel, Hitler Confronts England (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1960), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Gunther Hessler, German Naval History Series The U-boat War in the Atlantic: Vol. I. 1939-1941 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>7</sup> France gave Germany a separate ultimatum on the same day and it expired at the same time as the British ultimatum.

<sup>8</sup> John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: Penguin books, 1989), 44.

<sup>9</sup> The Navy's operation is generally referred to as the Battle of the Atlantic by historians.

<sup>10</sup> The entire invasion only took 35 days.

<sup>11</sup> Ansel, 117.

<sup>12</sup> When the Germans defeated France they also defeated Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Luxembourg. The Germans occupied all of these countries until driven out by Allied forces. Due to their agreement with the Vichy French government they only occupied the Northern section of France.

<sup>13</sup> Keegan, 54.

<sup>14</sup> The British pulled their troops out of Norway to support the BEF, in France, after the Germans started their offensive against France.

<sup>15</sup> Most historians refer to the *Luftwaffe's* operation over England as the Battle of Britain.

<sup>16</sup> German General Alfred Jodl, quoted in Ansel, 118.

<sup>17</sup> German General Franz Halder, quoted in Ansel, 141.

<sup>18</sup> Ansel, 196.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>20</sup> Keegan, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Ansel, 253.

<sup>22</sup> Ansel, 253.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>24</sup> Hessler, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Keegan, 104.

<sup>26</sup> Winston Churchill quoted in Keegan, 104.

<sup>27</sup> Göring was the head of the war production effort early in the war. It is interesting to note that he believed a modern Air Force made a Navy obsolete.

<sup>28</sup> U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington: 1995), A-1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., A-2.

<sup>30</sup> Unlike RAF fighters, German fighters had to stay with their bombers to protect them. This gave the German fighters the tactical disadvantage of being slower, their position more predictable and became easier for the RAF to engage or neutralize.

<sup>31</sup> German bombers were slower and less maneuverable than RAF fighters and therefore more likely to get shot down.

<sup>32</sup> Turn-around time refers to the time required to rearm, refuel and return an aircraft to combat.

<sup>33</sup> Ansel, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Dönitz, Memoirs, Ten Years and Twenty Days (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 134-141.

<sup>35</sup> Ansel, 250.

<sup>36</sup> Keegan, 101.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald Lewin, Ultra Goes to War (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 25.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 83.

---

<sup>39</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, A-2.

<sup>40</sup> Ansel, 196.

<sup>41</sup> Hitler referred to the *Luftwaffe*'s operation over Britain as the "air war" in *Führer* directive 17.

<sup>42</sup> Keegan, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, A-1.

<sup>44</sup> Keegan, 101.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> This statement applies to the September 1939 to December 1940 time frame.

<sup>47</sup> Lewin, 87.

<sup>48</sup> Keegan, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Förster, 194.

<sup>50</sup> Ansel, 76.

<sup>51</sup> Edward E. Nettleton "The Campaign Against Britain," Unpublished Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1995, 3.

<sup>52</sup> This assumes the RAF would send fighters to defend merchant ships delivering cargo to England. Considering the need for the food and other strategic materials this is a sound assumption as long as the merchant ships were within British fighter range.

<sup>53</sup> The British fought the Germans during the Saar offensive while the Germans were invading Poland and they sent expeditionary forces to Norway and France to counter those German offensives.

<sup>54</sup> Ansel, 253.

<sup>55</sup> Robert C. Rubel "Operational Level Leadership," Unpublished Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1996, 3.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Card, Orson S. Ender's Game. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1977.
- Collier, Richard. Eagle Day, The Battle of Britain. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980.
- Craig, Gordon A. Germany 1866-1945. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Döenitz, Karl. Memoirs, Ten Years and Twenty Days. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959.
- Fleming, Peter. Operation Sea Lion. London: Pan Books, 1984.
- Förster, Jürgen E. "The Dynamics of *Volkegemeinschaft*: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War" in Military Effectiveness: Vol. III, The Second World War, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, 180-220. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988.
- Hart, B. H. Liddell. The German Generals Talk. New York: Morrow & Company, 1948.
- Hessler, Gunther. German Naval History Series The U-boat War in the Atlantic. Vol. I. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989.
- Holborn, Hajo. A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Hough, Richard and Denis Richards. The Battle of Britain. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.
- Lewin, Ronald. Ultra Goes to War. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.
- Murray, Williamson. "British Military Effectiveness in the Second World War" in Military Effectiveness: Vol. III, The Second World War, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, 90-135. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988.
- Nettleton, Edward E. "The Campaign Against Britain." Unpublished Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1995.
- Rubel, Robert C. "Operational Level Leadership." Unpublished Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1996.
- Syrett, David. The Defeat of the German U-boats. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994.
- Tzu, Sun. The Art of War. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Doctrine for Joint Operations. Joint Publication 3-0. Washington: 1995.